Transnational Documentaries: Mediamakers Take on the New World Order
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I. **Introduction**

A new world (image) order is indeed emerging. But it differs greatly from the one then-President George Bush prophesied during the 1991 Gulf War and the one President Bill Clinton fantasized in his 1992 and 1996 State of the Union addresses. While Bill Clinton argued for V-chips to control media violence in the home and Internet connections in every school to salvage public education, his speech—focusing exclusively on media content—symptomatically repressed his unwavering, unexamined support for a totally unregulated concentration of media transnationals that will inhibit diversity, public debate, access and democracy.

On February 1, 1996, Congress overwhelmingly passed a new telecommunications law that effectively eliminates all constraints upon both vertical integration and horizontal concentration across industries. It will accelerate media megamergers. Writing in The Washington Post, Jonathan Tasini, president of the National Writers Union, declared that this law ushers in a new era of media "Robber Barons": it advances unrestrained transnational communication oligopolies, effectively annihilating freedom of speech and democratic control over media content. Tasini says, "Before it's too late, the public must snatch back the reins." (1) The current corporate transnational media universe, for example, features the most intensive cross-media merger activity in history, which has, for all intents and purposes, rendered competition an obsolete practice and concept: Disney/ABC Capital Cities, Turner/Time-Warner, Westinghouse/CBS, Sony-Columbia. According to a recent issue of Variety that tracked globalization, once the mergers are completed, the Disney and Turner combines will become the two largest media companies on the globe, with operations and distribution spanning every continent and nearly every technology.

In the midst of this corporate struggle for worldwide domination, however, new media practices and new transnational media organizations have emerged to challenge and remake connections between people across borders: anti-copyright work that deconstructs corporate images, the Gulf War Paper Tiger project on satellite, media pirates interrupting signals with low-end technologies internationally, the Guerrilla Girls' World Wide Web sites, indigenous Fourth World broadcasting and international documentary co-productions and community samizdat video on the war in Bosnia.

We need to reimagine radical media for the twenty-first century, throwing out oppositions of dominant and alternative media formulated during a different period of late capitalism. In this vein, we propose a provisional construct of transnational documentaries as a strategic and political move in a period of rampant civil wars, unprecedented corporate transnational concentration and degradation of humanity across the globe. We want to reclaim the term transnational in order to radicalize it. We need new imaginings to navigate and investigate the relationships between progressive documentaries and the post-cold war world. Projects are currently being launched around the globe to combat the rapid diminishment of the public sphere through globalization. The MacBride Roundtable on Communication, instituted in the late 1980s as a global consortium of policy activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scholars and creators, meets yearly in different locations around the globe to, as its founding statutes declare, "promote democratisation of mass media, telecommunications and electronic networks, in line with the Right to Communicate as a basic human right of individuals and communities." The 8th MacBride Roundtable in Seoul, South Korea, held from August 24-27, 1996, interrogated the "new authoritarian forms" emerging in new technologies, such as "privacy" of transmission, intellectual property rights and copyright, as well as censorship and life threatening situations for journalists in the

Middle East, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

The Roundtable also pushed for building alliances among video NGOs beyond the national level in order to track the "activities and strategies of transnational corporations as they affect the lives of workers." In the United States, the National Labor Committee has presented a successful model for using video to document the lives of workers in the textiles industries. They spearheaded the successful 1995 campaign against GAP for exploiting child workers in Central America with their video Zoned for Slavery (1994). The tape chronicles how young women are forced to work long hours, fed birth control pills to control their fertility and policed at the manufacturing plants. In one scene, the Korean owners of a textile plant in El Salvador order the video camera to leave the premises, but the camera still rolls. The tape and the ensuing campaign mobilized the NAACP, church groups, women's groups and anti-NAFTA labor groups, and propelled Bob Herbert to write several Op-Ed pieces for The New York Times. The National Labor Committee is currently exposing the Disney Corporation's exploitation of the textile workers who produce Disney's insignia clothing with a video titled Walt Disney in Haiti (1996). In October, the National Labor Committee announced that its would expand its attack against Disney by looking into the company's operations in Burma, a country ruled by an authoritarian military dictatorship.

We consider this project a polemical intervention into the emerging transnationalization of the world. For example, during the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, AT&T featured commercials lauding their global communications and information networks with montages of international athletes dressed in costumes from various countries high jumping, throwing the javelin and running. We want to bring into the current discussions of the new global hegemony—primarily economic and technological to date—a focus on oppositional cultural practices, aesthetics and policies. These multiple, fluid and mobile interventions into global communication flows require not only new forms of theorization about radical media, but also bold and innovative artistic and policy strategies, as well as "raids" across borders. This new work—on video, film, the Internet—moves simultaneously between the local, the regional, the national and the global, defying repressive nationalist territorialization.

Not simply a scholarly effort to create new theoretical labyrinths, we see transnational documentaries as a crucial organizational effort to connect thinking about media from all over the globe in order to open up new conceptual territories for both the theory and practice of film and other media. Indeed, this project seeks to deterritorialize documentary history and theory from its location in the North and West in order to provisionally think through new ways of making connections across real and imaginary borders of immigration, race, class, gender, identity, diaspora and nation. We believe that media scholars and activists need to think through the shifting, multiple relationships between the South and East, North and West as fluid, intersecting categories that are never stable or fixed. For example, Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *El Naftazteca: Pirate Cyber-TV for A.D. 2000* (1995) was a live satellite broadcast mixing together English and Spanish, phone-ins, MTV-inspired deconstructive clips from Hollywood and Mexican films, images of "Aztecs," a virtual reality piece of a Mexican crossing the border and a talk show host dressed in a pastiche of Aztec headdress, a mariachi suit and Native American garb presenting newscasts about the new world where Anglos are a minority. The piece combines the old technology of cable access and radio call-ins with the new technologies of cyberspace, virtual reality and satellites to destroy the border between new and old technologies, English and Spanish, Mexico and the U.S.

II. Transnational Theory
Transnationalization will define the twenty-first century. Many diverse writers, from Benjamin Barber to Zillah Eisenstein to Hans Magnus Enzenberger to Susan Sontag to Cornel West argue that the twenty-first century commenced with the revolutions and geopolitical restructurings of 1989. A powerful body of work has erupted within the last five years in political theory, political economy, sociology, feminist theory and postcolonial studies to chart the operations and effects of the globalized economy. Writers from a variety of fields and theoretical positions such as Aijaz Ahmad, Arjun Appadurai, Jeremy Brecher,

Tim Costello, Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, David Morley and Kevin Robins, Robert Reich and Malcolm Waters have outlined the economic contours and psychic/cultural operations of the new world order. Several journals have also emerged in the last five years to track transnational developments: *Public Culture, Third Text, Diaspora, boundary 2.*

Many commentators argue that the transnational economy is different from the old (although still present and constantly mutating) multinational economy headquartered in nation states. Masao Miyoshi, in an influential article published in *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 1993), offers an important distinction between the multinational and transnational corporation. He argues that the multinational corporation— headquartered in the new/old nation state but operating in a number of countries—is gradually denationalizing and transnationalizing. He observes, "a truly transnational corporation, on the other hand, might no longer be tied to its nation of origin but is adrift and mobile, ready to settle anywhere and exploit any state including its own, as long as the affiliation serves its own interest."

Several general theoretical contours of transnationalism can be distinguished across a variety of disciplines and sources ranging from literary theory to political economy to political theory to feminist theory to postcolonial theory to *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* descriptions of new telecommunications business mergers. Transnational enterprises are structured horizontally and vertically simultaneously. They are flexible and fluid, in constant adaptation and mutation to changing political and social conditions. They rely on computer technologies to increase the speed of all communications and business transactions, thereby dislocating capital from a specific location. They constantly prey upon, produce, cultivate and appropriate plurality and diversity rather than negotiating between fixed power blocs as during the Cold War. Communications and culture constitute central economic fulcrums of the transnational era, as media political economists Armand Mattelart and Herbert Schiller have elucidated. Rather than a model of domination, the transnational operates in multiple sedimentary layers of finance, media, culture and politics.

These theoretical markers point to a paradox that requires analysis. On the one hand, they reflect the language of corporate management and reengineering. The corporate desire for endless flexibility and diversity, as Jeremey Rifkin shows in *The End of Work* (1995), has triggered one of the most devastating workplace downsizings in U.S. history, a process expedited by new communications technologies such as computers and by new production and distribution systems. Workers at all levels of industry—secretaries, factory workers, accountants, college faculty, middle managers—are losing jobs across all sectors of manufacturing, professional work, service and education, despite large corporate profits and a bull market. No job will remain the same in the twenty-first century. Work—whether in Toyota factories, radio stations or college classrooms—is being reengineered, restructured, deskilled, multiskilled and sped up.

For corporatist transnationalism, racial, gender, ethnic and sexual identities are to be dematerialized, depoliticized, declawed and decorporalized into new, further segmented markets for the new accelerated capital growth. The conflicts that mark and define these racial, sexual, gender and ethnic differences are neutralized within commodity fetishism. This process of commodification can be observed in blue jean ads geared toward a gay audience, in MTV Raps, in the United Colors of Benetton campaign (a favorite topic for deconstruction in the new literature on transnationalism) and in Hollywood's courting of young black directors like John Singleton and Mario Van Peebles.

If, as Richard Barnett and James Cavanaugh have pointed out in *Global Dreams* (1994), capital is without a home and migrates in cyberspace from site to site, it is also, increasingly, without racialized, gendered, ethnicized or sexualized bodies and denies the specificities of any bodies at all, turning them all into sites and discourses of consumption. In the virtual, fluid world of the transnational corporate landscape, everything is smooth functioning as long as racial, gender and national difference is controlled by

ignoring the bodies of *maquiladora* workers in Mexico; of Guatemalan and Cambodian women sewing in textile factories in Los Angeles; of AIDS patients without health insurance; of immigrants from Latin America and Asia; of victims of nationalist aggression in Bosnia, Rwanda and Myanmar; and of African American and Asian communities within the U.S.

An adversarial transnationalism, therefore, will need to reassert the racial, gender, ethnic, sexual and national differences of multiple bodies. Our argument for a construct of adversarial transnational documentaries displaces categories of "alternative," "oppositional" or "guerrilla" media, terms that suggest that one can easily define the opposition in the first place and that it can be located in some definite, fixed space. The concept of adversarial transnational documentaries wrenches the notion of the transnational away from its corporatist location, moving it instead into the disruptive realms of bodies, people, movements and representational practices that dislodge corporate influence by creating new places for social justice on a global scale. As Jean-Marie Guéhenno has forcefully argued in his *The End of the Nation State* (1995):

> our "political" institutions, because they are still largely inspired by an institutional logic, do not know how to handle this tension between a dynamic openness and a protective isolation. The definition of frontiers, the constitution of a body politic, are still understood as essential, the stable foundation on which a society may subsequently be constructed. The logic of the networks will completely upset this perspective: the frontier is no longer a beginning, but an ending, always precarious, by nature fluid—for fluidity becomes the condition of competition and dynamism in the age of networks. No juridical space is ever definitively fixed.

We believe instead that retrieving and fighting for public space—on public television, satellites, the Internet, public libraries, pirate radio, through fair use appropriations, in public schools, in arts funding, in NGOs like the MacBride Roundtables, in non-profit institutions like colleges and universities, media centers and art museums—is an absolutely essential move, as nearly all of this space has been whittled away by the forces of privatization and commercialization. Thus, we reject the idea of an idealized public sphere, as defined by Habermas and those influenced by his work, as too amorphous and undefined for the present tumultuous moment. We also reject the notion of a reinvigorated civil society that some theorists and policy activists have invoked to fight the transnational. Both terms are anchored within the domain of the liberal welfare state that is systematically being disposed of around the globe. We are unwilling to accept any notion that argues that a place exists outside of economic and material relations, an underground world of talk, when all the material relations of media production are being dramatically reengineered and reorganized to limit public space and debate. In addition, these spaces, economies and cultural productions are in more flux and change than either the concept of the idealized public sphere or the civil society can account for. This is not an academic argument over theory, however. People within the U.S. and all over the globe are being destroyed physically, economically, politically and psychically, and these communities—Los Angeles, Rio de Janeiro, Sarajevo, Kigali, Port au Prince, Belfast—are not public spheres, but spaces of destruction, starvation and torture.

Adversarial transnationalism, then, as a reimaging of relations among media, politics and the economy suggests a constant shuttle between domination and resistance, between hegemonic power and multi-oppositional alliances, between repression and hope. Films, videos, Web sites and CD-ROMs are emerging that operate within this new epistemological nexus—work that refigures the relationship between the local, regional, national and global as one of endless mediation, integration and negotiation rather than separation. It deploys multiple languages, hybridities and strategies to deconstruct the smoothness of the transnational and to repack its sedimented layers with frissure and conflict, the very disturbances that the transnational is always attempting to recuperate and recycle as commodities and markets. *Love, Women and Flowers* (1988), a film by Colombian filmmaker Marta Rodríguez, documents the effects of carnation production on the bodies of women workers and traces the movement of capital

across borders. The film travels through several countries—Colombia, Netherlands and the U.S.—but constantly figures the workers as agents of struggle and change who disrupt the smooth flow of capital.

Traditional constructs of national cinema and national identity are complicated by the economic, psychic and political realities of transnationalization. Nevertheless, we are unwilling to completely abandon the concept of the national and the regional for a universalist fantasy of global citizens who forfeit their identities for a Disney World representation of cultural difference. The political and cultural functions of the nation retain power, although the economic operations of the nation have been transnationalized—Chinese and Mexican immigrants are denied entry to the U.S., Muslims are harassed in Paris, Turks are firebombed in Germany and Serb nationalism mercilessly destroys Sarajevo, once a symbol of multiculturalism. We would like, however, to begin an investigation into how the transnational functions within and around concepts of the national, the regional and the local.

III. Transnationalization and Culture

Most accounts of the relationship between transnationalization and culture expose two blind spots that animate our efforts to reimagine a radical, adversarial form of documentary. First, most of these approaches to transnationalization—whether the *Social Text* special issues on Edward Said and on Civil Society, or the many books emerging on transnationalism—discuss media and culture mainly in terms of its location within corporatist transnational systems, often referring to it as cultural capital, and using examples of the worldwide penetration of Disney, CNN and Hollywood productions.

While these cultural formations certainly form one layer of our media landscape, these writers have usually ignored the emerging adversarial fields and the interventions that have also multiplied across borders. These practices use both high-and low-end technologies in an attempt to rewire, reroute and find openings within the horizontal webs of transnational corporate control over new means of distribution from satellite, Web pages, CD-ROM, video, cable and telephone lines. Most of this writing, then, has focused on media practices and telecommunications that emanate from first world transnationals, rather than the truly pluralized, heterogeneous, decentralized work that connects across nations, races, genders and other identities to displace the horizontal webs of control. For example, in Papapapá (1996), New York video artist and animator Alex Rivera uses animation, live action and appropriated footage from multiple sources to raise questions about the complex relationships between Peru and the U.S., immigration, the Conquest, potato chips, racism and popular culture.

Media pirates and the anti-copyright movement within the cyber-sector provide an excellent example of how heterogeneous work connecting across identities can raid the transnationals and put dents in the horizontal webs. Mix tapes, produced by African American, Latino and Asian youth cultures across the globe, use old-fashioned turntables and digital sound recording equipment to remix music "owned" by large music companies. Bertelsmann (one of the largest media transnationals in the world), Sony-Columbia and Atlantic have launched campaigns to induce federal and state government officials to do sweeps of areas where these mix tapes are sold on the streets.

In film and video, stealth attacks on the monopoly ownership of images by the media transnationals have produced a new form of adversarial documentary operating within the cracks of the 1978 Copyright Law, which allows for "fair use" of images for purposes of parody, criticism, or education. These works seek to liberate images from their corporate confines, affirming that image culture is part of public culture. Brian Springer's *Spin* (1995) is a tour-de-force compilation tape that appropriates satellite feeds. In one sequence, George Bush and Larry King discuss how to obtain non-prescription drugs in Israel. In another, a hospital administrator in Los Angeles reveals to a network morning talk show host that his hospital sees worse things than any facility in the third world. Craig Baldwin's *Sonic Outlaws* (1995) operates as a manifesto for media pirates, deploying all forms of media to steal images and conduct what the situationists terms *detourné*: satellite, police scanners, pixel vision, 16mm film, Hi-8 video, the Internet,

sound recording, folk songs, video compilation, found footage and media pranks like the Barbie Liberation Organization. The film on one level traces the Irish rock band U2's lawsuit against media appropriators, specifically the cyber-group Negativland. But on a more complex political and aesthetic level, the aggressively and viscerally edited film is a salvo against copyright as a form of authoritarianism for corporate control and a call to action for media piracy.

A major feature, then, of much current theorization of transnationalization understands culture mainly in terms of the consumption of corporatist media products and only occasionally, as a more radical variant, in terms of a reworking of these corporatist media products within local contexts of reception and resistance. Most of these books and essays end with an invocation—often only one paragraph, as in the case of *Global Dreams*—for some new, yet-to-be-imagined form of international political struggle in the arenas of political organization and media policy. Many end with a clarion call for international solidarity and an end to deregulation of media industries worldwide through reclaiming some sort of dematerialized public sphere or invoking a concept of civil society outside of material economic relations. Despite these calls, film and media studies, as well as cultural studies, have remained ensconced in identity politics, postmodernism, poststructuralism and other such critical methodologies. Although politically important in opening new territories and developing new voices, much of this work remains tethered to some unified but limited conception of the nation at the very moment when "the nation" is being dismantled socially, economically, culturally and politically by the multiple, shifting landscapes of transnationalization and diaspora. Much of the explosion of work in cultural studies in the last 10 years, for example, has focused quite heavily on texts and spectator practices, while media conglomerates have undertaken unprecedented mega-mergers that have totally remade the economic infrastructures of all media. At the same time, public funding for the arts and independent media has been decimated.

Much of the new work on documentary theory and practice, we believe, has retreated into a sort of clandestine academic nationalism, focusing mostly on North American and European work and deploying within various poststructural or identity-politics models. We do not want to lose these critical frameworks as they have been important in carving out a place for difference and hybridity within the homogenizing and totalizing domains of corporatist media. Instead, we seek to think through ways in which these separate and often isolated and isolating agendas can form mobile alliances or coalitions in order to reimagine the fight for social justice within the new world order. Much work has all ready been done in policy and by artists; now scholars and media writers need to join in.

Moreover, the current form of critical nationalism in documentary work has repressed two crucial constructs that inform the new social and political relations of the twenty-first century: political economy and policy, and a true heterogeneity reconceptualized across borders, as in the scholarly and creative work of John Akomfrah, Coco Fusco, Gómez-Peña, Mako Idemitsu, Deep Dish TV, Paul Gilroy, Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, Philip Mallory Jones, Marta Rodríguez, Jean Marie Tenno and international labor coalition videos on the border and public health videos on AIDS in the Pacific Rim. For example, in the multi-channel video installation Dreamkeeper (1989), Jones explores the transnational psychic and political space of the African Diaspora, uniting images of an African American man alone in an empty apartment in Baltimore with dance rituals in East Africa and images of Angolan fighters. The soundtrack is composed of African tribal drumming, an aural device signifying communication across borders and across the different identities of the African Diaspora.

In this respect, the agenda of cultural studies-type reception theory is completely inadequate. It is simply insufficient to retheorize the new transnational media environment as one of exuberant, resistant consumers from all over the globe—the Philippines, Prague, Moscow, Montana—when the ability to imagine a culture of diverse and adversarial producers worldwide is completely endangered by the demolition of public space on every level. Much reception theory represses the production of imaginative, public spaces by stressing the activity of consumption within "liberated" transnationalized markets.

Although we support the broadening of the sites of culture that cultural studies has enabled, we increasingly see several significant absences on the theoretical and practical levels. As many writers on transnationalization have pointed out, the new world media economy depends on three movements: first, privatization of culture; second, deregulation; and third, merger across industries and nations for global penetration and commercialization. The revolutions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in 1989, the democratic revolution in Tiannamen Square in China in 1989, the end of apartheid in South Africa and the Gulf War in 1991 mark a massive reorganization of geopolitics, international economies, the international media landscape and the conception of the nation-state. The massive mergers in the transnational telecommunications sector in the last five years have concentrated the communications sector across industries and across the globe without much public debate. Public space is literally being eaten up.

But, as Janet Wasko has forcefully demonstrated in *Hollywood in the Information Age* (1994), these synergies across industries have worked to position the new technologies of cable, satellite, videocassette, CD-ROM, etc. as basically distribution channels for the large media transnationals, effectively raising the barrier to entry for independent producers and annihilating the local and the national. In effect, the new telecommunications industries could be described as supranational entities dependent on consumption. In theorizing a concept of adversarial transnational documentaries, we need to consider what conditions of production are necessary for political interventions into these transnational flows.

The tension between the rapid corporate transnationalization of media within the last 10 years and an emerging adversarial transnationalism has constructed new social and aesthetic spaces that require astute and careful analysis. How are these new social and aesthetic spaces mapped visually in new global documentaries? What spaces within the emerging horizontal, cybernetworks of the new transnational economy provide openings for contestation and social change?

IV. Transnational Documentary Film
As transnational media corporations spread their tentacles around the world to homogenize cultures and consume differences, a new configuration of documentary arises to resist this process by focusing on the complexities of cultural, national and regional collisions. A plethora of exciting documentary work from all over the world has erupted in response to transnationalization and the massive displacements of people, urging an international rethinking of the relationships between politic(s) and media(s).

Historical work anticipating this modality of the transnational documentary has been produced across the globe—Chris Marker's *San Soleil* (1982, Great Britain), Johann Van Der Keuken's *The Way South* (1981, Netherlands), Kidlat Tahimik's *Perfumed Nightmare* (1977, Philippines), Andrei Zagdansky's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1989, Ukraine), Jean Pierre Gorin's *Poto and Cabengo* (1979, France), Peter Kubelka's *Unsere Afrikareise* (1961-66, Austria), Dennis O'Rourke's *Cannibal Tours* (1987, Australia), Su Friedrich's *The Ties that Bind* (1984, U.S.), Peter Watkin's *The Journey* (1987, Great Britain) and Marcel Ophuls's *November Days* (1992, France).

This list is not intended as inclusive nor is it put forward as a claim to establish a new "genre" of international cinema. Rather, it suggests that while a construct of transnational documentary is emerging, it is not an entirely new paradigmatic shift in filmic discourse; instead, it is one that has transmuted out of the old for a new set of social and political conditions. Adversarial transnational documentaries reclaim and rehabilitate modes from these older films—tracing interactions between and around cultures; performing histories; imagining new subjectivities and alliances; mapping conflicts as multidimensional; traversing fantasies and material limits, cultures and political economies; formulating new analytics; and locating new emancipatory places. But it reworks them within the demands of the new world system in the post-cold war era.

In his book *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (1992), Fredric Jameson analyses some films that provide a mapping of the world system—such as *The Parallax View* (1974, by Alan J. Pakula), *Perfumed Nightmare* (1977, by Kidlat Tahimik), *Videodrome* (1983, by David Cronenberg)—as allegories of unconscious, political effort. Noting the changes in the world system produced by the disappearance of the nation, he argues: "For it is ultimately always of the social totality itself that is a question in representation, and never more so than in the present age of a multinational global corporate network." In advocating a concept of adversarial transnational documentaries, we broaden this claim to ask where representation, artistic practice and policy can intercept and reroute transnational corporate networks consciously and pragmatically, rather than only allegorically and unconsciously.

Both globalization and the demise of a certain kind of nationhood have precipitated a decline in the availability of points of identification. Therefore, in the process of charting out this imaginary territory of the transnational documentary, we have discerned two political strategies that independent media has taken to deal with economic globalization and the death of nationhood. These two distinct strategies represent ways in which new modes of identification and community can be constructed: one local, the other a radical, communal transnational. The local strategy is epitomized by the use of small-format video by activist communities working for AIDS education, reproductive rights, indigenous rights, etc. This work on small format, which is distributed through alternative channels on the strength of the mail or word of mouth has grown exponentially because of the availability and affordability of the means of production. For example, Chris Hill, a Buffalo, New York-based video artist and curator, has been collecting and screening video samizdat work produced during the revolutions of Eastern Europe in Hungary, the former Czechoslovakia, the former East Germany, Poland and the former Yugoslavia. She is collaborating with community media makers in Eastern Europe to create a traveling program of these underground videos that were central in organizing democratic political groups during the revolutions of 1989. Slovenian scholar Marina Grzinic is also working to theorize the development of the new media spaces of the ex-Yugoslavia as zones of liberation and hope during the Bosnia war by looking at the underground video produced by youth subcultures that reject nationalism and exhibit in rock clubs.

This localism suggests a search for foundational identity. It can be understood as an inflection of the "imagined community" described by Benjamin Anderson, one that secures its identity through communications technologies that create the fiction of unity. On the more emancipatory end, this localism helps to coalesce tenuous communities like those formed around reproductive rights and clinic defense, environmentalism and AIDS. On the more repressive level, localism reverts to warring ethnicities that reject community across difference, typified in Bosnia-Hercegovina. It, therefore, has congruencies with a whole range of socio-political practices arising in the 1980s, such as religious separatism, states rights and health care reform.

The other strategy is the transnational. In this sense, we are attempting to rescue the construct of the transnational from its multinational corporate environs to hypothesize its conceptual and political utility as a way to form alliances across a whole range of borders. We use the term transnational as both a description of documentary practice, and as a more utopian projection of the tact that political documentary might take within the new world orders. These transnational documentaries displace the economic and psychic nation and the national imaginary, rejecting a notion of the nation as an essentialist given. These films supersede the opposition between the first and third world, between the center and the periphery.

For example, in *Handsworth Songs* (1986, by John Akomfrah and Black Audio Collective), the third world is in the first world, and the nation is marked by Diaspora and ideological battle, constantly in conflict over definition, space, location and power. Daniel Reeves's masterpiece *Obsessive Becoming*

(1995) combines an excavation of family psychological and physical abuse with an interrogation of war and technological iconography infusing the construction of masculinity in the twentieth century. Morphing family images to create a continuous stream of connections and relationships between fractured images and damaged psyches, *Obsessive Becoming* deploys digital layering techniques to cross borders between the personal and the political, between nations and between identities. Reeves's own voice-over, simultaneously an expurgation of his pain and a reconnection of words to images, is edited with a voice-over of the Buddhist peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh describing the horrors of the Vietnam War. Blending old technologies like family photos and home movies with new digital imaging systems, *Obsessive Becoming* refutes the borders between media, families, nations and identities, morphing them all into a continuous stream of history, memory, fantasy and political ethics.

This development of a new documentary practice is different from 1970s and 1980s political documentary strategies, particularly in countries of the North. These transnational documentaries, of course, do not simply break with 1970s modes that reconstitute submerged discourses, but incorporate, for example, talking heads or linear history, as one of many strategies of explanation of the transnational webs. Despite the aesthetic realities that these newer films intertwine with older strategies in their texts, it is worth noting some of the differences as a way to chart out some distinctions between these new works and previous documentary incarnations.

A whole array of revisionist, and somewhat realist documentaries of the 1970s and 1980s—for example *Word is Out* (1977, by Mariposa Film Group), *Times of Harvey Milk* (1984, by Robert Epstein), *Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (1980, by Connie Field), *The War at Home* (1980, by Glenn Silber and Barry Alexander Brown), *Eyes on the Prize Parts I and II* (1986-89, produced by Henry Hampton)—assume the nation as a unified entity. These films dive into a hidden area of repressed history, such as that of gays, women or labor, with the goal of widening and expanding the concept of nation.

The transnational documentary, on the other hand, subverts the notion of nation as well as identity politics that search for the self within the nation. The historiographic project of these films is to pluralize the concept of nation. In *Poto and Cabengo*, for example, twin girls speak their own language, a mother speaks German and a California working class father hardly speaks at all, producing a veritable babel of languages and silences. Gorin has not simply rendered an ethnography on a pair of unusual girls, but has explored how language relates to nationality and location, and how it is never "pure." Such transnational documentaries, then, explore how cultures, nations and identities are constructed, how they evidence all sorts of contradictions, hybridities and combustions and how new social spaces are always in volatile, contentious development.

We can find another corollary to the assumption in 1970s and 1980s revisionist documentary that the nation might be reformed by repositioning spectatorship. These films support national reformation by implicitly working with the idea that identification with the text and the characters in the text is a good thing, that the spectator occupies a valuable position. These films create a mythology of community through emotional address bolstered by rational argument; spectators are lured into joining, for 90 or so minutes, a utopian community. Although we criticize this strategy as politically deficient for the transnational era, we very much want to retain the notion of community. We believe that political and cultural work must still have the goal of working *within* differences rather than evening them out. A plethora of visually challenging, even beautiful and compelling experimental work from the 1980s, however, seems to have inverted the old adage that "the personal is political" by mapping nearly everything as only personal, seeing the political as only an inflection or context upon which psychic investigation can be mobilized. The 1970s and 1980s documentaries extended the ideas of John Grierson, who saw the role of documentary as basically reforming the state to increase participation in community. The Grierson project presumes that the economic, civic and cultural nation is available to all, that it is unified and malleable without major structural interventions or changes. The Griersonian project, then,

hinges on a concept of nation and identification with the text, a point brilliantly argued by Brian Winston in his recent book *Claiming the Real* (1995).

These documentaries produced over the last quarter of a century, as well as many television documentaries and international support films, for South Africa and Central America, for example, reveal the persistence of this tradition of a direct link between public culture, the public good and the survival of the nation. Information and community will bolster the national purpose, enfranchise more people, pluralize the nation and thereby strengthen it. This approach was extremely effective at various political moments and during various political struggles in the last 20 years. However, within the new transnational corporate webs and the restructurings of the world system after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Tiannamen Square and the Gulf War, new theorization and practice is necessary to confront the closing down of political alliances, the privatization of nearly all communication systems worldwide and the precipitous decline of access to communications production. What happens when the nation has moved to many different places and spaces within the transnational webs?

V. What Can Be Done
Old theoretical categories linking documentary practice to the nation have changed dramatically in the post-cold war and transnationalized cultural economy; they have been reorganized, reconceptualized, rearranged, remade, rewired. Borders of every kind—national, technological, theoretical and psychic— have been crossed and hybridized. Conventional categories have blurred. Nationalist "us vs. them" conflicts have erupted, demanding new political and aesthetic responses.

Despite these changes, the only truly international books that have been published on the documentary genre are Erik Barnouw's *Documentary* (1972), a project of massive international scope that uncovered films from over 20 international archives, and Thomas Waugh's *Show Us Life* (1984), on explicitly committed documentaries. Only one book on Latin American documentary has been published, Julianne Burton's *The Social Documentary in Latin America* (1990). There is clearly a need for film and media scholars to reconnect with adversarial internationalism once again.

In pushing for a concept of transnational documentaries, we are issuing a call to action for scholars to explore the newly emerging, explosive construct of transnationalism in all of its mass-mediated and visual forms. New analytical models and visual strategies are needed to deconstruct the complex relationships between political economies and media practices. This act is no mere theoretical exercise. Faced with famines, murders, wars, racist attacks, massive defundings of the non-profit sectors and the closing down of public access, discourses and debates, it is an act of survival.

The term transnational also suggests a new way of imagining relations, connections and alliances to defy and remake borders that open up possibilities for change. It suggests that national identities, national boundaries and nation-states can no longer explain new social and aesthetic formations of cultural hybridity. It suggests that old borders between national and international, between narrative and documentary, between high art and popular culture be razed. It holds utopian possibilities for an end to borders erected by nationalisms of all sorts.

In this polemic on the transnational documentary, we seek to open up a terrain for imagining new world visual orders. A wide swathe of analytical methodologies—as multiple and fluid as possible so that they overlap and critique each other—are necessary: political economy, postcolonial theory, feminist theory, third cinema, queer theory and cultural studies. This new adversarial transnational work needs to utilize deconstructive methodologies to unpack visualities, and visualities to deconstruct policy. Policy is no longer only the domain of the policy wonks for NGOs—scholars and artists must enter the fray.

Adversarial documentaries have burgeoned in the last five years around the globe from a variety of

producers and across a variety of nations and regions that offer critique of this new transnational world. These documentaries refuse the fragmentation, isolation and nationalism that is the corollary of corporatist transnationalism by looking for and imagining new social and aesthetic alliances. They occupy and create new imaginary spaces in the new world order. They are acts of refusal and hope.

We want to connect film and media studies with transnational thinking in other fields. If, as Winston and Nichols have both argued, documentary has some ties to "the real" and to "the referent" and to the difference that makes a difference, then its critical apparatus must move like these explosive emerging works and new networks themselves towards an exploration of the transnational. Theory must be mobilized differently. By necessity, it, too, must be fluid, mobile, flexible. In developing this new zone of the transnational documentary as a different way of thinking about film and social change, we hope to break open some of the multiple paths that adversarial internationalism in media could take. Otherwise, film and media theory will become politically inconsequential in the coming millennium, ossified as a residual formation of nostalgia and impotency rather than a way to mobilize new imaginative structures to contest the new media landscape.

But a new theorization and strategy of transnational documentary cannot be undertaken by two lone film scholars. Makers and writers from across the globe—the South, East, West, North—need to join forces, discussing and debating artistic practices as well as policy, economy and culture. We want to open up the field of documentary and film studies for a major polemic on transnationalization and its complete reordering of our epistemological frameworks, theorizations and practical interventions. Rather than leaving critical practices trapped within the texts themselves and the academy, we hope that this manifesto on transnational documentaries will contribute to policy debates on the new world visual order, which, as Meaghan Morris has so forcefully argued in her essay "On the Beach," are central to any emancipatory project. To paraphrase Michael Berube, we need a documentary theory that works both inside and outside the academy and in-between. And we need to connect to a variety of textual practices and strategies, as well as policy and economic structures across nations, identities, regions and imaginary zones.

Our notions about transnational documentaries developed out of our thinking about one particular congruency, or, rather, two parallel tracks—transnational corporations and transnational documentaries. We are attempting to splice these constructs together to see if they can inform our thinking of how each operates. We want to begin an exploration into how we can, as film scholars committed to social and political change, begin to understand a new form of documentary and its relationship to political activism. We are interested in how these new forms of documentary challenge notions of center and periphery, modern and postmodern, transnationalism and nationalism, nations and identities.

As we all brave massive restructurings of the world economy, work speed-ups and unemployment, devastating wars and ethnic strife, enormous upheavals of bodies through immigrations, Diasporas, exiles and public health disasters on a global scale, there are only two choices. We can retreat into a isolated and cynical despair as we flip through the 500-channel, multimedia, virtual universe. Or we can connect, form coalitions and collaborate with people across real and imaginary borders. Despite the myth of plurality and multiplicity purveyed by the transnationals, it would seem to us there is only one choice.

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